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# The Weeknd brings 'Madness' to Madison Square Garden

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(Photo: Matthew Eisman, Getty Images)

NEW YORK — "I think it's safe to say we're here to stay, right?"

A third of the way through his sold-out show at Madison Square Garden, The Weeknd took a moment to reminisce on his "long-term relationship with New York," having played the city's Bowery Ballroom, Paradise Theatre and Williamsburg Music Hall in years past. (He plays Brooklyn's Barclays Center on Wednesday and Thursday.) Earning thunderous cheers from a mostly twentysomething crowd, it became clear in that moment that the once-enigmatic Canadian singer had indeed arrived, after a year of climbing and subsequently topping charts with sultry pop hits *Can't Feel My Face*, *The Hills* and *Earned It* (*Fifty Shades of Grey*).

The Weeknd finds 'Beauty' in the mainstream

(<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2015/08/27/weeknd-beauty-behind-madness-new-album/32404959/>)

His rock-star transformation is all the more striking if you've seen his past live shows. Just three years ago (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hkb929BxIX8>), The Weeknd (real name: Abel Tesfaye) was a somber songbird pacing center stage and brooding in the spotlight as he earnestly delivered viral hit after hit off his bedroom mixtapes. But at Monday's "The Madness" tour stop, he was more akin to a whirling dervish — darting across the stage, sideways moonwalking, and cherry-picking up and down to various levels of the elaborately lighted set. Sometimes, the sheer enormity of the production threatened to swallow up its wild-haired ringleader, but Tesfaye managed to wrestle back command with his powerful, lilting vocals.

With his heightened onstage persona came even bigger arrangements. Warmly shouting out his bandmates on multiple occasions throughout the hour-and-a-half set, Tesfaye amplified each song with the maximum electric-guitar licks and crashing drums it could handle, turning *Beauty Behind the Madness* cuts such as *Angel*, *Tell Your Friends* and *Dark Times* into exhilarating rock anthems. Where the recasting was less successful was on *Trilogy* mixtape tracks including *High For This*, *The Party & The After Party* and *House of Balloons*, whose performances were rushed and intricate production muddled by bombastic instrumentation.

Before Tesfaye took the arena, the concert got off to an energetic start with on-the-rise rapper Travis Scott, whose genuine enthusiasm to be there shined through his heavily Auto-Tuned set list and smoke-filled stage getup (accentuated by cacti and projections of dark, cloudy skies). Bringing concertgoers to their feet with breakout single *Antidote*, the energy was unfortunately sucked out of the room when R&B/pop singer Banks started her set, which much of the audience spent shuttling between the venue's bars and restrooms. But it was no fault of her own: Banks' voice was more arresting than it has ever been, as the reserved songstress has gradually become a more confident and compelling live performer since her first jaunt opening for The Weeknd two years ago.

On the Verge: R&B goddess Banks is a friend to fans

(<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2014/11/30/on-the-verge-banks-beggin-for-thread/19154087/>)

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2015/11/17/the-weeknd-madison-square-garden-banks-travis-scott/3935822/>

The polarizing reception to Tesfaye's opening acts is probably more telling of where he is as an artist. After all, the 25-year-old is still shedding the last of his indie, bedroom image as he embraces the 21st-century Michael Jackson he's always aspired to be, which at times, makes his performances feel a bit soulless. But surely by the next time he headlines in New York — he suggested a Yankee Stadium show, to massive cheers — Tesfaye will know exactly who The Weeknd is.

**Set list:***Real Life**Losers**Acquainted**Often**High for This**The Party & The After Party**King of the Fall / Crew Love / Or Nah / Professional**The Morning**House of Balloons / Glass Table Girls**Tell Your Friends**The Birds (Part 1)**Shameless**Earned It**Dark Times**As You Are**Angel**D.D. / In the Night**Can't Feel My Face**Prisoner**The Hills***Encore:***Wicked Games*

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